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AN INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY LANGUAGE.

AN active campaign is being carried on in France with a view to securing the adoption of an international auxiliary language. There would be no occasion to speak of it if the commission established for this object cherished the chimera of giving to an artificial language the value and use of a living language. The present is an undertaking that is being conducted in a practical way and which deserves examination. I do not mean to intimate by this that I regard its success as easy or even probable. For indeed a first observation forces itself upon every one who faces this question of a common linguistic medium with an open mind. Even if this instrument were found and adopted by academies and prescribed by governments, what would be its office and scope?

Among the languages spoken to-day—leaving aside the yellow races, that is to say, the third part of the population of the globe approximately—we can recognize three principal groups: the Anglo-Germanic, the Neo-Latin and the Slavic. In the first group the advantage of number belongs at present to the English; in the second group to the Spanish including the Portuguese; and then to the French; the Russian ranks after the English and before the German. Now if we weigh carefully the conditions of the success of a language, the extent of its actual possession (I mean the number of those who speak it), its political influence, its simplicity, etc., it will appear convincingly that the English language has the greatest chance. German presents difficulties which embarrass the efforts made to propagate it. French world policy by its weakness compromises the success of the French language, despite very definite ad-

vantages on its part. In brief, and without pushing this discussion too far, it seems that the struggle must come in the future between two or three of our living languages, so that the adoption of an auxiliary language would not yield a permanent result. But leaving aside these conjectures regarding a possible evolution, let us consider the question of immediate utility.

We may well doubt whether an artificial language if written will translate easily the movements of thought and can be applied to other subjects than the most ordinary themes of life; it is one thing to give such a language the benefit of the qualities of a text that one may be translating, and quite a different thing to use it as a direct instrument. And as a spoken language (if indeed it can actually be spoken) it would be no more likely to give real expression to thought, since language is *par excellence* a personal matter, adequate to each individual. The use of it, therefore, would necessarily be limited from every point of view. Furthermore we are supposing that it would be easier to learn and understand an artificial language than a living one, which seems to me far from being demonstrated.

One last observation is forced upon me straightway. If I learn a living language, English for instance—if I learn it practically and not scholastically, I have the immediate advantage of being able to converse with 150 million men; and so with the other languages, in proportion to the number of people who speak them. Hence one may say that any individual who possesses two foreign languages in addition to his mother tongue, or even one such, receives at once a benefit which no artificial language could possibly yield him.

Commercial interests are already satisfied in large measure by the partial unification of the universal business vocabulary. As for the advantage which a few scholars might have from nearly understanding one another in a Congress, I confess that I do not estimate it very highly. I do not think it will be very much worth while to set academies and governments to work and resort to scholastic constraints for a result which seems to me so slight.

How can we give life to that which is by its very definition dead? This is one great objection among many others. I hasten to add that MM. Couturat and Leau who are the most active members of the

"commission," have foreseen and occasionally refuted some of these objections, either in pamphlets published by them, or in the book which they are now offering us and which I make it my duty to call the attention of your readers.¹

The authors have had the patience to analyze all the systems that have been proposed, to classify them and criticise them. Their very curious work is a genuine monument. Their preference, we can infer, is for "Esperanto," but they give us all the details of the case and leave the reader to judge for himself. I have just expressed with all freedom some general and not altogether favorable thoughts. I beg MM. Couturat and Leau not to charge them to invincible ill will. I do not claim to have exhausted the discussion, and I would have hesitated to oppose an interesting attempt.

PARIS.

L. ARRÉAT.

¹ *Histoire de la langue universelle.* Paris, Hachette, 1903.